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AUTHOR Kitao, Kenji
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ABSTRACT

In Japan, absolute social status and power relationships among people are clearer than in the United States. The Japanese language supports this social system with the use of a special polite language ("keigo"), structural use of which is the same as polite language in English. The differences lie in the degrees of familiarity used and in the complexity of the relationship between speakers, as well as in interpretations of the relationship. For example, in a request, if the listener is superior to the speaker, the Japanese tend to acknowledge that superiority more, using more negative politeness (the kind that minimizes imposition) than do Americans. In English, inviting others into a group by use of informal language is polite, whereas in Japanese keeping others outside the group is the polite form of behavior. Thus, Americans tend to use more positive politeness (the kind that satisfies the speaker's need for approval) than Japanese do, and Japanese usually use negative politeness to those outside the group. When researchers surveyed native speakers of American English and nonnative English as a Second Language (ESL) learners on their perceptions of degrees of politeness, results indicated that mood contributes most to the politeness hierarchy, in this order: interrogative- most polite, declarative--next most polite, and imperative--least polite. (A set of 14 hypotheses to test politeness strategies in English is included and offered for testing.) (NKA)

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Differences between Politeness Strategies Used in Requests by Americans and Japanese

Kenji Kitao

Department of Communication

Michigan State University

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Differences between Politeness Strategies Used

in Requests by Americans and Japanese

Introduction

As Japan's economy grows and international transportation develops, more and more Japanese people visit the United States for business, study, vacations, etc., and are encountering Americans in everyday settings where communication is necessary. Their problems in communicating in English thus become more and more significant as areas of research.

One area of communicative competence in which Japanese people have problems is politeness (Saito, 1985). An early study suggested that politeness strategies play an important role in requests (Tracy et al, 1984). Requests, to a larger or smaller extent, impose on the hearer (H). If requests are not made appropriately, the desired goal may not be reached, H may be embarrassed, or the relationship may be damaged. Requests in a foreign language, therefore, require skill in judging and using politeness.

In this paper, I will discuss requests, politeness, and politeness strategies in general, politeness in Japanese, some differences of politeness between Americans and Japanese. I will present a formula and a model of politeness strategies. Then I will suggest some hypotheses that can be tested in future research.

Requests

A request is a speech act in which the speaker (S) asks H to do something. S is imposing on H. H has to pay the cost to

carry out the request, and usually S profits from it. The larger the request, the greater the imposition on H. If S asks H to lend $100, the imposition is greater than if S asked H to lend $20. The imposition determined by the size of a request is called absolute imposition. The imposition involved in requesting a loan of $100 is five times larger than in requesting a loan of $20. If the size of the imposition is too large, H may reject the request, and S will not achieve the goal and may be embarrassed. S wants to maintain a good relationship with H if they are part of a continuing relationship, or at least to make a good impression if H is a stranger.

However, in actual situations, H perceives the size of the request in terms of relative imposition, which is affected by various factors, rather than in terms of absolute imposition. Two variables that affect relative imposition are the relation to S's social distance (familiarity) and social status (power) (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). If familiarity between S and H is high (close social distance), the relative imposition is smaller than if familiarity is low. If S asks for a loan of $100 from a parent and $20 from a teacher, the teacher might feel more imposed upon than the father, even though the absolute size of the request is smaller. If S is more powerful than H, the relative size of requests becomes smaller. If a boss and a subordinate ask H to do the same thing, H feels more imposed upon by the subordinate than the boss, because the subordinate has less power than H, but the boss has more power than H.

In summary, H does not feel an absolute imposition (size of

request) directly. H rather feels relative imposition, which is affected by the relational distance, that is, the combination of familiarity and power in the relationship with S.

Brown and Levinson (1978) argued that cultural variables also affect imposition on H, but they did not discuss specific variables in any depth. There are several situational variables, three important ones being the necessity of the request, the ease of carrying out the request, and cultural differences.

The necessity of the request refers to how badly S needs to impose on H with the request. If S and H are at the cashier in a cafeteria, and S finds that he/she does not have money, H will probably understand that S has little choice but to make a request to borrow money. If, in contrast, S asks for $20 to pay a bill that is not due for a week, and if S can as easily borrow the money from a closer friend, the necessity is lower and H will be less understanding and feel more relative imposition. High necessity makes relative imposition smaller.

The ease of carrying out the request refers to the degree of difficulty involved. If H is very rich, $100 is not much money, but if H is poor, even $20 is a lot of money. Thus, whenever S asks for $20, the absolute imposition is the same, but the relative imposition is much smaller for a rich person than for a poor person.

Cultural differences cannot be adequately discussed in a paragraph or two. However, the amount of relative imposition for the same request in the same situation may vary from one culture to another. I will discuss differences between American and

Japanese cultures later.

Therefore, the size of request (absolute imposition) is mitigated by the relational distance between S and H (familiarity and power) and the situational variables (necessity, ease of carrying out the request, and cultural variables) and becomes the relative imposition which H experiences.

Politeness

Politeness is a communication strategy which people use to maintain and develop relationships. Politeness is mainly used in only two functions: competitive goals, such as requesting, ordering, demanding, and begging, and convivial goals, such as offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, and congratulating. Competitive goals are essentially discourteous, and convivial goals, courteous (Leech, 1983). Since requests are discourteous by nature, politeness is an important issue.

Politeness in requests is a communication strategy which S uses to achieve S's goals and, if S and H are in a continuing relationship, to help preserve the relationship. S chooses the level of politeness based on S's perception of what H will consider the size of the relative imposition. S will try to use the right level of politeness. If S is not sufficiently polite, H may still feel imposed upon and be embarrassed. If S is too polite, the utterance may sound sarcastic to H.

Brown and Levinson (1978) define politeness as maintaining the H's face, that is, letting H feel unimposed on and approved of in certain respects. Face refers to wants, and Brown and Levinson (1978) argued that we have two types of wants: ego-

preserving wants and public-self preserving wants, which refer to the desire to be considered a contributing member of society. The former (ego-preserving wants) generates negative face, and the latter (public-self preserving wants), positive face.

Politeness not only decreases relative imposition on H but also increases approval from H for achieving the goal. Giving H options or making the request indirectly makes the request more polite by giving H more freedom as to whether H carries out the request. Making the request more polite decreases imposition and helps keep a good relationship. However, that increases the chance of rejection, of S not achieving the goal. Thus, it is important to increase H's approval of S.

Brown and Levinson (1978) distinguish two types of politeness, positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness is used to satisfy the S's needs for approval and belonging (maximizing positive face). Positive politeness expresses solidarity. Negative politeness functions to minimize the imposition (negative face). Both types of politeness are increased when the size of the request is larger. Negative politeness is increased when H is more powerful and when familiarity between S and H is lower.

Politeness is shown through linguistic forms, nonverbal cues, and communicative functions. It attempts to take into account the complexity of motivations and goals that are realized in discourse, and the possible conflicts among them that must be resolved. According to Fraser (1978), politeness is a function which is based on the H's perception of an utterance. H perceives imposition based on relative imposition mitigated by

politeness. If relative imposition is larger, greater politeness is necessary.

Strategies of Politeness

Positive and negative politeness strategies are used both to increase solidarity and to decrease imposition. They interact in complicated ways according to nature of the act and the status of S and H. They include the following:

positive politeness strategies

1. noticing, attending to H's interests, wants, etc.
2. using in-group markers
3. being optimistic
4. seeking agreement
5. indicating common ground
6. offering, promising

negative politeness strategies

1. being conventionally indirect
2. questioning, hedging
3. being pessimistic
4. minimizing the imposition
5. giving deference
6. apologizing

Brown and Levinson (1978) present five superstrategies of politeness which show different levels of politeness.

1. A speaker may perform the request "baldly," making no attempt to acknowledge the hearer's face wants.

2. A speaker may perform the request while attending to the hearer's positive face wants, using what Brown and Levinson (1978) label a positive politeness strategy (p. 106).

3. A speaker might perform the request with negative politeness, acknowledging the hearer's negative face wants, the desire to be unimpeded and not imposed upon.

4. A speaker may "go off-record" in performing the request. Here a speaker performs the act but in a vague manner (e.g., hinting) that could be interpreted by the hearer as some other act.

5. Performing no request and gaining no goal.

The first strategy is not polite at all, and the last one is very polite but does not gain anything. Thus there are four different levels of polite strategies that have the potential to gain the goal.

The theory holds that speakers contemplating the performance of a request will generally choose higher-numbered (more polite) strategies in proportion to the seriousness of the request. However, because of costs (effort, unclarity, other threats to face) associated with the use of higher numbered strategies, speakers will not generally select strategies that are more polite than necessary (Brown and Levinson, 1978).

Leech (1983) proposes politeness principles (PP) from the viewpoint of pragmatics. He argues that people use the PP in real communication. PP, of course, varies across cultures.

There are six maxims in pairs:

1. Tact Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
   A. Minimize cost to other.
   B. Maximize benefit to other.
2. Generosity Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
   A. Minimize benefit to self.
   B. Maximize cost to self.
3. Approbation Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
   A. Minimize dispraise of other.
   B. Maximize praise of other.
4. Modesty Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
   A. Minimize praise of self.
   B. Maximize dispraise of self.
5. Agreement Maxim (in assertives)
   A. Minimize disagreement between self and other.
   B. Maximize agreement between self and other.
6. Sympathy Maxim (in assertives)
   A. Minimize antipathy between self and other.
   B. Maximize sympathy between self and other.

All maxims are maximizing approval and minimizing imposing in order not to threaten face. The first pair are similar to

imposition, the second pair, to power, and the third pair, to familiarity.

Politeness in Japanese

Absolute social status and power relationships among people are clearer in Japan than in the United States. The Japanese language supports this social system, and special polite language, called keigo, is used.

Using keigo, S can show respect to superiors or people outside of his/her group, the humility of S or of people in his/her group, and formality to the third person or thing (teineigo) (Horikawa & Hayashi, 1969). Japanese people consider power differences and solidarity very important, and acknowledge them through keigo.

The basic structure of the use of keigo is the same as polite language in English. The differences lie in degrees and complexity of the relationship and in differences in interpreting those relationships. For example, S needs to keep people in his/her group lower than H or people in H's group.

Differences of Politeness in English and Japanese

As mentioned above, the basic theory of politeness is similar in English and Japanese, with degrees of familiarity, power, and the size of the request. The slight differences are that power is more important and clearer in Japanese, and familiarity is somewhat different. If H is superior to S, Japanese tend to acknowledge that superiority more and use more negative politeness than Americans. In English, including other people in one's own group by use of informal language is polite, but keep-

ing other persons outside the group is polite in Japan. Therefore, Americans tend to use more positive politeness than Japanese do, and Japanese usually use negative politeness to people outside of their groups.

There are numerous examples of uses of negative and positive politeness in Japan. A Japanese often apologizes to keep good relationships, even when he/she is not wrong (negative politeness). If a Japanese feels the need to disagree or criticize, he/she does so very indirectly (negative politeness). If an issue is minor, Japanese people usually agree even if they want to disagree (positive politeness) (Naotsuka, 1981).

Few big differences exist between politeness in English and in Japanese, however, though degrees of politeness and interpretation of politeness in different situations might differ. Minami (1987) points out that fixed relationships between S and H contribute most in use of politeness strategies in Japanese, but politeness strategies tend to vary by the content of the request or situations in the United States. He further argues that requests in English have more variety of expression and Japanese has more conventionalized expressions for requests. These differences contribute to relative imposition as cultural variables shown in the model below.

Politeness Formula

The following formula summarizes the previous discussion.

$I_R = I_A \times RD \times SV$

where I_R is a relative imposition.

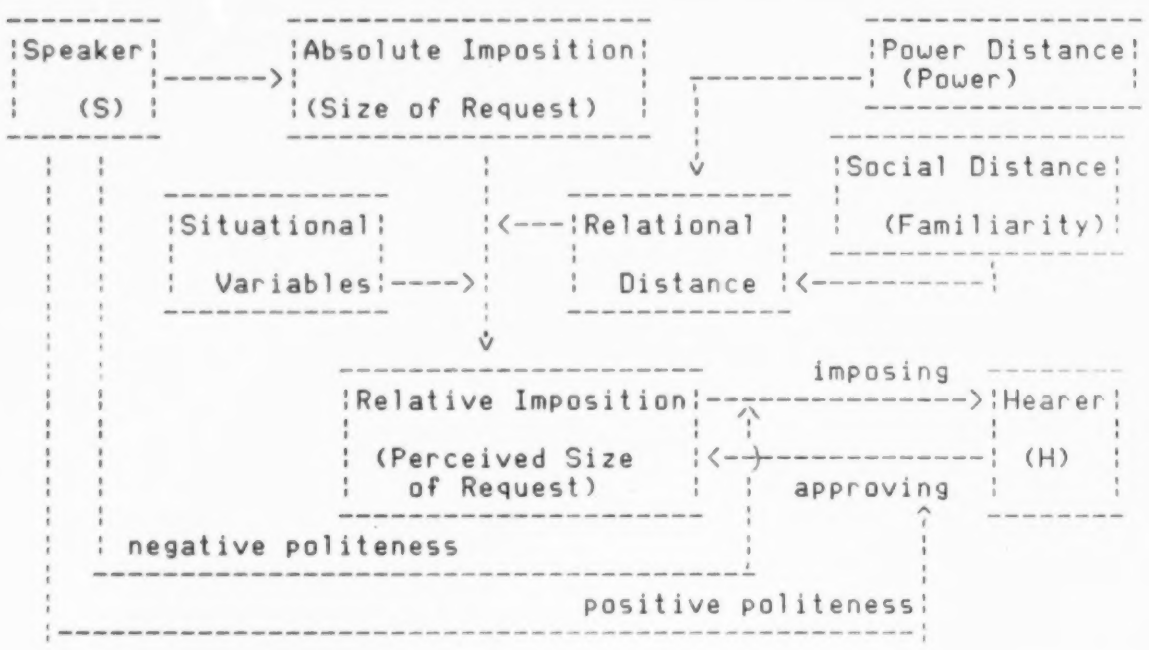
I_A is an absolute imposition.

RD is relational distance (Familiarity X Power)

SV is situational variables (Necessity + Ease + Cultural Variables).

Model of Politeness in Requests

I will diagram the politeness theory which I have explained.



Previous Studies of Politeness

Few studies have been conducted to determine the level of politeness of different types of requests in English. I found five studies, two on deference with native speakers and three with both native and nonnative speakers of English.

Fraser (1978) asked a variety of college students to rank eight sentences in order of descending deference. Each sentence had either the modal can or could, was positive or negative, and was either in the interrogative or imperative-plus-tag form. Nearly all subjects ordered the sentence in the order shown below.

1. Could you do that
2. Can you do that
3. Do that, could you
4. Do that, can you
5. Couldn't you do that
6. Can't you do that
7. Do that, couldn't you
8. Do that, can't you

In Fraser's (1978) second study, a different group of 40 college students were given pairs of sentences and asked to rank them in terms of relative deference. Ten sentences were used and the results, listed in order of decreasing deference, were as follows.

1. Would you do that
2. I would like you to do that
3. You might do that
4. I must ask you to do that
5. Can you do that
6. Will you do that
7. Why not do that
8. Do you have to do that
9. I request that you do that
10. Do that

Fraser concluded that native speakers have a sense of which of any pair of requests shows the most deference. In the first study, the results indicate that sentences with a modal (can or could) are more polite than sentences without one. Positive sentences are more polite than negative sentences. Interrogatives are more polite than imperative-plus-tag forms.

Also past tense is more polite than present tense.

In the second study, the results indicate that sentences with the modals "would", "might", "must" or "can" are more polite than sentences without one. Second person form is more polite than first person form (though this issue is confused somewhat by the fact that examples of negative politeness use first person). Past tense is more polite than present tense. Interrogatives are more polite than declaratives and imperatives. We can also speculate that uncommonly used requests may be perceived as having different politeness levels.

Carrell and Konneker (1981) investigated and compared politeness judgments of native speakers of American English and nonnative ESL learners on a set of request strategies in English which varied systematically in their syntactic/semantic properties, that is, formal syntactic, semantic aspects of negative "face" and conventionalized politeness. They surveyed native and nonnative speakers of English on their perceptions of degrees of politeness using different mood (interrogative, declarative, and imperative), tense (past and present), and modal (present or absent).

They used the following forms:

1. interrogative--past tense modal	Could you give me a pack of Marlboros?
2. interrogative--present tense modal	Can you give me a pack of Marlboros?
3. interrogative--no modal	Do you have a pack of Marlboros?
4. declarative--past tense modal	I'd like a pack of Marlboros.
5. declarative--present tense modal	I'll have a pack of Marlboros.
6. declarative--no modal	I want a pack of Marlboros.

7. imperative	Give me a pack of Marlboros.
8. imperative--elliptical	A pack of Marlboros.

As the researchers expected, this was the order that the participants put the utterances in.

Results indicated that the mood contributes most to the politeness hierarchy, in this order: interrogative--most polite; declarative--next most polite; imperative--least polite. Presence of modals contributes next most to politeness; modals don't add much to the politeness of the already-very-polite interrogative, but they do contribute more to the politeness of the not-as-polite declarative. If the modal is past tense, this adds a small additional degree of politeness.

A high correlation was found between the native and non-native judgments of politeness on the eight request strategies. The nonnative speakers identified the same order of relative politeness that the native speakers did. There were few differences across nationalities or levels of English. One major difference is that the ESL learners tended to perceive more politeness distinctions than did native English speakers. Interestingly, native speakers did not distinguish "Can you..." "I'd like..." and "Do you have..." much but nonnative speakers did. This is probably because they are so different in syntax but not in semantics and nonnative speakers did not understand such semantic differences. The same is true for "I'll have..." and "I want..." The order is different this time. These types of differences are really difficult even for nonnative speakers with high English proficiency. However, it is not clear from this

study whether the nonnative speakers would be able to use politeness strategies appropriately in different situations.

It is interesting that nonnative speakers are more sensitive to politeness. I think this extra sensitivity to grammar and other aspects of language can hinder nonnative speakers' mastery of English.

Several problems in these studies justify further research. One problem of Carrell & Konneker's study is that we do not know the level of English proficiency of the nonnative speakers. Further, it is not clear why Carrell and Konneker chose to test perceptions of politeness if they anticipated that there were few differences between native and nonnative speakers of English. Also, I believe that there would have been more problems in production, and nonnative speakers would encounter difficulties in actual communication. Thus, if they had done a study on production of politeness, they probably would have found more significant results.

There is only two studies comparing use of politeness by Americans and Japanese. Tanaka & Kawabe (1982) conducted a study with ten Americans and ten Japanese with advanced ESL proficiency. They asked subjects to place the following twelve requests in their order of politeness. The results are as follows.

Requests	Rank Orders	
	Americans	Japanese
1. I'd appreciate...	1	1
2. Could you...?	2	2
3. Would you...?	3	2
4. Can you...?	4	5
5. I'd like you to...	5	6
6. Will you...?	6	4
7. Turn down X, won't you?	7	8
8. Why don't you...?	8	9
9. Turn down X, will you?	9	10
10. I want you to...	10	7
11. Turn down X.	11	11
12. X (The Radio)?	12	12

(Underlining indicate significant differences between adjacent pairs of requests [$p < .01$].)

Tanaka & Kawabe (1982) found high correlations in perception of politeness among subjects in each group and concluded that both native speakers of English and advanced ESL learners are aware of the varying degrees of politeness. There is a high correlation between Americans and Japanese in their perception of politeness in requests. However, Japanese tend to be oversensitive to their politeness distinctions. Advanced ESL learners have acquired not only linguistic competence but also a pragmatic knowledge of English. Tanaka and Kawabe also argue that politeness in English increases as a function of the increasing freedom of H to refuse the request and the increasing politeness decreases the imposition.

Tanaka & Kawabe (1982) also conducted a study on the use of politeness strategies for requests at ten different psychological and social distances. They used six requests:

1. I would appreciate it if you could lend me X.
2. Would you lend me X?
3. Can you lend me X?
4. Lend me X, will you?
5. I want you to lend me X.
6. Lend me X.

Tanaka & Kawabe (1982) concluded that native speakers of English use polite strategies in distant relations and less polite strategies in close relations. Advanced learners of ESL use similar politeness strategies, but they tend to use less polite strategies. They also explained that "would you..." is most usable in any situation. They did not find any differences between American females and males in their use of politeness strategies. Americans used "would you..." more than Japanese, and Japanese used the elliptical imperative (6) more than Americans.

Hypotheses

Judging from the formula I presented above, and discussion of difference of politeness in English and Japanese, and previous studies, I can present the following hypotheses.

H_1: The larger the size of a request, the higher the level of politeness used.

H_2: The lower the familiarity, the higher the level of politeness used.

H_3: The higher H's power in relation to S, the higher the level of politeness used.

H_4: Japanese use more negative politeness to reduce imposition on H than Americans do.

H_5: Americans use more positive politeness to increase H's approval than Japanese do.

H_6 : Interrogative forms are more polite than declarative forms.

H_7: Declarative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

H_8: Past tense requests are more polite than future tense requests.

H_9: Past tense requests are more polite than present tense requests.

H_{10}: Requests with a modal are more polite than requests without one.

H_{11}: Positively worded requests are more polite than negatively worded requests.

H_{12}: Interrogative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag-question.

H_{13}: Uncommonly used requests are perceived as being at different politeness levels.

H_{14}: Japanese use less polite strategies than Americans do.

Testing these hypotheses can give us a deeper understanding of forms of politeness in English, and particularly differences in the ways Japanese and Americans deal with politeness in English. This in turn can help improve the education that Japanese students of English receive in a vital area of communicative competence, that of judging and using politeness.

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